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SUBJECT: KILLION MEETING WITH DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO KOICHIRO MATSUURA

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR LOUISE OLIVER FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Director-General Matsuura stressed his desire to maintain a strong American connection to UNESCO's work in education, despite the upcoming change in administration, by telling us that he planned to invite Mrs. Bush to a 26 January high-level meeting on literacy, and would be asking Mrs. Biden to participate as a keynote speaker at the second World Conference on Higher Education to be held in Paris in July 2009. End summary.

¶2. (C) House Foreign Affairs Committee majority staff member, David Killion, met with the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura December 10 at UNESCO headquarters. He was accompanied by Ambassador Oliver and Mission political specialist, David Ostroff. Mrs. Elizabeth Longworth, the DG's Chief of Staff, as well as a number of other UNESCO officers were also present.

¶3. (C) DG Matsuura began the meeting by mentioning the fact that UNESCO has now launched into action regarding Holocaust education, which prompted Mr. Killion to suggest the possibility of integrating a program on Raoul Wallenberg into the project, in tribute to the former HFAC Chairman, the late Tom Lantos. Matsuura seemed to respond positively to the suggestion. Mr. Killion went on to say that people in Washington are now talking about UNESCO in positive terms, given the fact that the UNESCO "brand" is special, and the organization's mandate provides an increasingly effective tool for the kind of "soft power" agenda the U.S. is likely to advance during the Obama administration.

¶4. (C) Mr. Killion said that the HFAC was advising President-elect Obama's transition team on UNESCO matters, and would be presenting a memo to the Obama transition team describing the opportunities for the new administration to build on Ambassador Oliver's efforts at UNESCO, notably in connection with education.

¶5. (C) When Killion mentioned that Mrs. Jill Biden is a community college professor, Matsuura immediately proposed inviting her as a keynote speaker for the second World Conference on Higher Education to be held in Paris this coming July. Killion said that the U.S. enjoys a unique higher education system, with its strong emphasis on community colleges, permitting people of all ages to continue life-long learning in a wide variety of subjects, and said that it would surely be a system that could be of interest to other areas of the world. DG Matsuura said that the July conference is of particular interest as it is the first gathering that will permit Member States to review and critique what work has been done in the field of higher education over the past ten years.

¶6. (C) Responding to Mr. Matsuura's kind words for Mrs. Bush in her role as Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade, Killion said that he was sure that the Obama administration would want to keep Mrs. Bush involved due to her important accomplishments in promoting literacy. The DG also said that he expected to hold a high-level group consultative meeting on literacy 26 January 2009, and would be asking Mrs. Bush to participate. The DG then mentioned the major education-related conferences and meetings that would be held by UNESCO in the coming months, which Killion noted would provide good opportunities for the Obama administration to learn more about UNESCO's work in education.

¶7. (C) On another subject, Matsuura said that the organization's Member States must be "vigilant" regarding the election of his successor. Killion agreed, noting that there is much to lose for the UN system in general. Killion added that his visit was designed to let others know of the concerns we have, to which the DG responded by saying do not be afraid to speak out more openly to express your concerns. Killion said that as good as relations are today, things could deteriorate rapidly should Republicans in the Congress demand the withdrawal of the U.S. from UNESCO, or cut funding. The DG then re-emphasized that the U.S. should not sit silently regarding what's taking place, a reference to the Egyptian candidature of Farouk Hosni to replace him.

¶8. (C) Matsuura said that he had just returned from Singapore, which had rejoined UNESCO in 2007, and added that they share a cautious attitude about their return to UNESCO given the current situation. The DG noted that whether we know it or not, the U.S. has a lot of allies. The DG added that he hoped the new administration would talk to the French in a "serious way".

¶9. (C) Noting that December 10 is Human Rights Day, Killion mentioned that the Congress is concerned about freedom of expression being rolled back, and asked Matsuura to continue to speak out forcefully to uphold the concept. Matsuura noted that he would be giving the first UNESCO prize for Human Rights later that afternoon to a French professor who participated in drafting the original text 60 years ago. Killion also raised the fact that Washington notices when Matsuura issued statements when journalists are killed, which prompted Matsuura to mention that UNESCO is holding symposia for journalists, and appreciates Jim Ottaway's financial support for the Cano prize.

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¶10. (C) Ambassador Oliver then changed the subject to compliment Matsuura's work, which has allowed UNESCO to become an important player as a neutral figure in Mid-East issues, noting the successes of the SESAME project and the consensus decisions on Mughrabi gate. Ambassador Oliver emphasized the fact that Matsuura's leadership, strong support and public commitment to issues like freedom of expression and press freedom are among the many accomplishments many Member States want his successor to build on.

¶11. (C) The DG then talked about the fact that UNESCO's Legal Adviser, Abdulqawi Yusuf, who will be moving to the Hague in January following his successful election to the World Court of Justice last month. The DG said that he has become a national hero in his home country, Somalia. He also noted that the U.S., Russia, and China all voted in support of his candidature.

¶12. (C) To end the meeting, Mr. Killion spoke about UNESCO's efforts to change the organization's policy to promote world-wide availability for its employees. The DG said that this has been a difficult battle, but that the ratio has been changing in favor of his policies, with one employee in the field for every two based in Paris. In 1990, Matsuura said that the ratio was one in the field offices for every five in Paris.

¶13. (C) Comment: Matsuura's remarkable statements urging the U.S. to "speak up" regarding the Egyptian DG candidature was surprising. It is clear that the DG is very concerned that his own legacy, which includes bringing the U.S. back to the organization after a 20 year absence, could be tarnished if a candidate so strongly rejected by the U.S. is elected. End comment.

OLIVER